

Michaud Helps Block Bill That Shortchanges Maine's Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Needs

Thursday, November 17 2005

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Michael H. Michaud today voted against H.R. 3010, the Fiscal Year 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations conference report, because it delivered painful cuts that will hurt people in Maine. The measure failed to pass the House of Representatives due to strong bipartisan opposition by moderates of both parties, and House and Senate conferees will now have to reconvene to redraft this legislation.

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"I am very pleased that this outrageous bill that slashes funding for our schools, health care providers, and worker training programs did not pass. The American public deserves the kind of investment in health, jobs and education that reflects our needs," Michaud said. "Certainly, this bill wasn't it."

Specifically, the conference report was slated to invest \$1.5 billion less in critical education, health care and job assistance than last year.

"Under this bill, we would spend more this week on tax cuts to the wealthy, at a total of \$70 billion, than on all education and labor programs over the entire year funded at \$68 billion under this bill. That is the wrong priority," Michaud explained. "I am pleased that this failed in a bi-partisan effort on the House floor."

"In a rural state like Maine, we simply can't afford giving away this critical funding for our schools, health centers, and worker training programs," Michaud stated. "Working and middle class Mainers won when this bill failed to pass."

The funding bill voted on today cuts education, health care, and human services by \$1.5 billion below what was spent in last year. Millions were cut from the No Child Left Behind Act, Pell Grant, LIHEAP, and Community Health Centers.

"This winter the cost of fuel is expected to rise substantially, and consumers are expected to pay 46 percent more for natural gas and 28 percent more for home heating oil," Michaud said. "Yet the conference report provides no funding increase for LIHEAP home heating assistance, a program designed to keep the heat on in the homes of low-income seniors and children. That is just wrong."

"This bill makes unconscionable cuts to a number of programs that are important to Maine," said Michaud. "No Child Left Behind is cut by \$784 million, the first time NCLB will have been cut since the law was enacted. This will be simply devastating to our schools as they work to fulfill the requirements under the law."

The funding bill also freezes maximum Pell Grant funding for the fourth straight year. No new funding is provided for all other student financial aid and support programs, even though college costs have increased by \$3,095, or 34 percent, since 2001.

The conference agreement does not include the \$8.1 billion in emergency funding provided in the Senate bill for pandemic flu preparedness, or any part of the \$7.1 billion requested by the Administration for that purpose. In addition, although nearly 46 million Americans are without health insurance, there is no new funding for Community Health Centers.

The conference agreement freezes or cuts most programs below their Fiscal Year 2005 levels. Community college training grants are cut by \$125 million, unemployment insurance and employment service offices to help the unemployed are cut by \$245 million, and Even Start family literacy services are cut \$125 million.

"Congress should be working to improve health care and education programs," said Michaud. "This legislation reflects the wrong priorities for Maine. It was about time that the leadership of the House recognized that there is still work for us to do."

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